

LIFE STORIES

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

TO HAVE A
NEAR-DEATH
EXPERIENCE

The day after
Roisin Fitzpatrick's

35th birthday, she experienced a severe headache and within hours was diagnosed with a brain haemorrhage. She explains what it feels like to have a near-death experience and how it has changed the way she lives her life

Words: Ciara Leahy

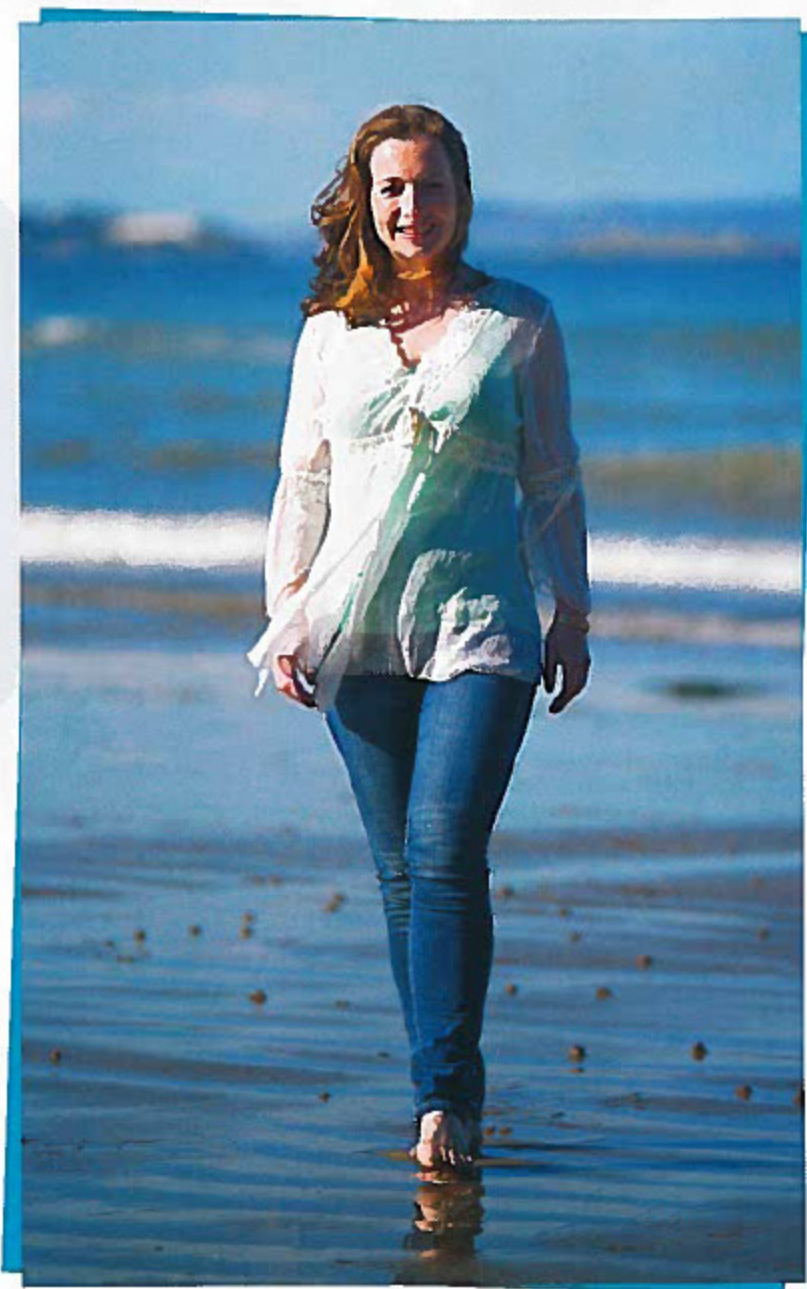
It may sound strange but before any doctor told me I was having a brain haemorrhage, I knew. It was the day after my 35th birthday and I was having one of those lovely, leisurely days, relaxing in my bedroom listening to music. Then without warning, a sharp pain shot through the base of my neck and ricocheted through my skull. The pain was so severe and happened so quickly, I knew it was very serious. I called an ambulance but as I had started vomiting, I felt myself get weaker and weaker. I crawled on my hands and knees to the front door and tried to remain calm.

When I was admitted to Beaumont Hospital, it was confirmed that I needed brain surgery the next day and was transferred to the ICU. It was terrifying. I woke up one morning feeling fit and healthy and went to sleep that night in a life-threatening situation.

It was that night, however, when I experienced my near-death experience. It was very sudden and I felt myself outside of my body. It was like I was standing at the edge of an abyss, embraced by a pure and unconditional love – nothing like I'd ever experienced. There was a hushed silence, a profound sense of peace and I realised I was no longer scared or in pain. The best way I can describe it is like being in an aeroplane travelling above the clouds and seeing the horizon in front of you. The difference was that I felt separate to the plane – part of that horizon.

For the first time I understood what life was all about. One of the Gaelic ways of saying rest in peace is "*solas síoraí*", which means eternal light. This is what I experienced: an eternal light. The experience came in waves throughout the night but, for me, there was no sense of time. I made the choice to come back because my parents were alive but it was a challenge, going from this peaceful state to finding myself back in my physical body and all the complications of a brain haemorrhage.

The next day, it turned out that I didn't need to have surgery but I was sick for quite a long time afterwards. I was physically exhausted and in excruciating pain. I could only lie on the flat of my back and found it difficult to talk, but spiritually I felt at peace. My life completely changed after this near-death experience. I now have no



fear of death and, ironically, it has given me the freedom to live life. It was like an a-ha moment and life became so much simpler.

I really wanted to share this experience with other people and because it was so difficult to express this experience through words, I did so through art, with clear crystals on silk canvases so people could connect with the light within themselves. And it really has connected with a lot of people; I've had 11 exhibitions in the United States, six in New York. This success also led to writing my book, *Taking Heaven Lightly*, which reached No 3 on the Irish bestseller list for non-fiction.

Life has certainly turned out quite differently due to this experience – not just because of my art and writing the book. I enjoy life a lot more and it has helped me to deal with challenges, whether it has been financial problems or relationships.

This new direction in my life doesn't pay as well as when I used to work for the European Bank but I'm simply not as concerned with material items. What is important to me is to treat people with respect, to help them to be less fearful of death and to live better lives.

Certainly the biggest challenge I faced was in 2010, when both my parents died within 10 weeks of each other. This was heartbreaking and I don't know how I would have coped if it wasn't for my near-death experience. However, because I knew they were surrounded by peace and love, it made the grieving process so much easier. I still miss them but I have great comfort in knowing they are safe. I have no fear of death.

The experience has allowed me to help people live happier, more fulfilled lives and, through my work, I want to help even more people to connect with this inner calmness. ☺